

In Our Own Voice

Breaking down the stigma of
mental illness from the inside out

What is In Our Own Voice?

Simple yet powerful

- Two person presentation
- Video
- Discussion

The presentation

- Person first introduction
- Dark days
- Acceptance
- Treatment
- Coping
- Successes, hopes, and dreams

The video

- Follows the same 6 sections
- No generalization
- Variety of diagnoses, ages, diversity

Facilitated Discussion

- Allows for soul searching of the audience
- Lead-in questions by presenters after each section to prompt discussion
 - tailored for the needs of each group

In sum

- An opportunity for frank dialogue about mental illness, what it is, what it feels like, and how recovery works- from the experts, or, those living with

Why do we need IOOV?

- Because stigma exists!
- Too much text learning, not enough exposure
- Or inaccurate exposure (media depictions)
- Hopelessness among families, friends, providers- this is a message of hope

What is stigma?

- Stigma is defined by the Encarta English Dictionary as:

The shame or disgrace attached to something regarded as socially unacceptable (mental illness)

How is stigma expressed?

“No flowers” dilemma

Keeping it hush hush

Words used to describe people with mental illness during an episode: Lazy, selfish, difficult, weak, violent, brought it on self, lack of faith

Media portrayals of people with mental illness

What effect does stigma have on people on the inside and the outside?

- We begin to believe the myths of stigma
- Self esteem (down on self)
- Relationships (people fade when you most need them)
- Employment (employers call a person lazy, irresponsible)
- Housing (NIMBY- transitional homes)
- Medical (discrimination in health care- it is seen somehow as “different”, or, is treated as such)

How IOOV breaks down stigma

Internally

- Creating a safe space/community for training to tell stories in a non-judging atmosphere, among peers
- Reframes the experience of mental illness as one of gaining empowerment and recovery
- Gives voice to struggles and successes
- Helps people give back to others, sense of being “worth” something, dignity

Reducing stigma on the outside

A recent study conducted by researchers Amy Wood and Otto Wahl was published in the peer-reviewed Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal. The study concluded that:

“NAMI’s ‘In Our Own Voice’ Consumer Education Presentation is effective as a strategy for increasing audience knowledge about mental illness and improving attitudes toward those who experience psychiatric disorders.”

The subjects of this study were college students.

Testimonials

“This is the first time that I heard stories of great successes from people with serious mental illness. Really great presentation! It gives me a lot of hope”

Counselor

“It was valuable to me to hear about actual experiences. I can read about them until I am blue in the face, but hearing the presentation firsthand helps me to understand mental illness”

University of MD Student

“Sharing experiences made it real and gave us hope. I plan on taking better care of myself and stop blaming others for my illness”

Inmate, Clarksburg Correctional Facility

“Your courage and perseverance sets a high example for all of us. I have already shared some of your coping strategies with my son to help him reduce stress.”

Family member

How to implement IOOV

- Plan the year's budget according to goals for the program
- Recruit participants
- Set the training date and site

Resources available from the National office to help with planning

- Intranet- online resources including a new coordinator's manual
- Phone call away
- Store with marketing materials
- Conference calls

How IOOV changed my own life

“I used to tell people I had bipolar disorder, but didn’t have any further framework to explain what that meant. To have a structure with which to express my story was an immense relief. It was something I didn’t even know I needed, but that helped me recover”

Sarah O’Brien IOOV Program Director

Benefits of training- an excerpt from the IOOV training manual

Presenting to family members:

- “Family members are eager to hear what issues face consumers. They look for information about what to expect from their own relative; they ask personal questions and need to feel there is hope for recovery. Family members may also vent frustrations. Family members include parents, grandparents, spouses, siblings, and children. When looking for common ground, try to place yourself in their shoes. What concerns and questions do you think that family members share with you?”

Personal Impact

- Felt less alone
- Regained feeling of intelligence
- Found role models
- Sense of comfort- nothing to prove
- My self esteem improved
- Volunteer work with NAMI
- You begin “hanging around” NAMI and opportunities-golden- arise

Re engaging in life

- Attained first meaningful part time job since becoming ill. Continued working slowly but surely- published articles in NAMI newsletter, wrote about experience, spoke more often- broadened view of world.

Where did IOOV lead me?

Applied for the position of IOOV Program Director after 5 years of presenting, three years of training, 1.5 years of working at the local office.

Where has IOOV led US?

- We have reached over 150,000 audience members
- We have trained over 2,000 presenters
- Reach over 20,000 people per year

Final Participant Quote

“My recovery really began when I started giving In Our Own Voice presentations. I didn’t realize how much shame and guilt I still carried. Every time I talked about Mental Illness being an illness like any other, it freed me. I regained my self-respect. I’ve been able to heal my relationships with family and friends, and now hold a staff position as NAMI San Diego In Our Own Voice Coordinator and State Trainer. In Our Own Voice has enriched my life and I learn so much from the other presenters and every audience. I am grateful for this program and I’m honored to help make a difference in peoples lives.”

Diana Waugh
NAMI San Diego Coordinator,
In Our Own Voice

Final Audience Member Quote

“Consistently, attendees reported new enlightenment regarding mental illness. It was frequently mentioned that the speakers helped to eliminate old stereotypes, and encouraged them that there was hope for those struggling with mental illness.

- Gina M. Wilkie, Deputy Probation Department
Orange County, CA

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